



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE AGRICULTURAL WORLD

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 11 November 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to be able to meet you on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Agricultural World, for this moment of celebration and reflection on the present state of this important sector of life and the economy, as well as on the ethical and social perspectives that concern it.

I thank Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, for his kind words expressing the sentiments and expectations of all those present. I respectfully greet the dignitaries, including those of different religious backgrounds who are representing various organizations and are present this evening to offer us the contribution of their testimony.

2. The Jubilee of farmers coincides with the traditional "Thanksgiving Day" promoted in Italy by the praiseworthy Confederation of Farmers, to whom I extend my most cordial greetings. This "Day" makes a strong appeal to the perennial values cherished by the agricultural world, particularly to its marked religious sense. To give thanks is to glorify God who created the land and its produce, to God who saw that it was "good" (*Gn* 1: 12) and entrusted it to man for wise and industrious safekeeping.

Dear men and women of the agricultural world, you are entrusted with the task of *making the earth fruitful*. A most important task, whose urgent need today is becoming ever more apparent. The area where you work is usually called the "primary sector" by economic science. On the world economic scene, your sector varies considerably, in comparison to others, according to continent and nation. But whatever the cost in economic terms, plain good sense is enough to highlight *its real "primacy" with respect to vital human needs*. When this sector is underappreciated or mistreated, the consequences for life, health and ecological balance are always serious and usually difficult to remedy, at least in the short term.

3. The Church has always had special regard for this area of work, which has also been expressed in important magisterial documents. How could we forget, in this respect, Bl. John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*? At the time he put his "finger on the wound", so to speak, denouncing the problems that were unfortunately making agriculture a "depressed sector" in those years, regarding both "labour productivity" and "the standard of living of farm populations" (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 123-124).

In the time between *Mater et Magistra* and our day, it certainly cannot be said that these problems have been solved. Rather it should be noted that *there are others in addition*, in the framework of new problems stemming from the globalization of the economy and the worsening of the "ecological question".

4. The Church obviously has no "technical" solutions to offer. Her contribution is at the level of Gospel witness and is expressed in *proposing the spiritual values that give meaning to life* and guidance for practical decisions, including at the level of work and the economy.

Without doubt, the most important value at stake when we look at the earth and at those who work is the principle that brings the earth back to her Creator: *the earth belongs to God!* It must therefore be treated according to his law. If, with regard to natural resources, especially under the pressure of industrialization, an irresponsible culture of "dominion" has been reinforced with devastating ecological consequences, this certainly does not correspond to God's plan. "Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air" (Gn 1: 28). These famous words of Genesis entrust the earth to man's *use*, not *abuse*. They do not make man the absolute arbiter of the earth's governance, but the Creator's "co-worker": a stupendous mission, but one which is also marked by precise boundaries that can never be transgressed with impunity.

This is a principle to be remembered in agricultural production itself, whenever there is a question of its advance through the application of biotechnologies, which cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of immediate economic interests. They must be submitted beforehand to rigorous scientific and ethical examination, to prevent them from becoming disastrous for human health and the future of the earth.

5. The fact that the earth belongs constitutively to God is also the basis of the principle, so dear to the Church's social teaching, of the *universal destination of the earth's goods* (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 6). What God has given man, he has given with the heart of a father who cares for his children, no one excluded. God's earth is therefore also *man's earth* and that of *all mankind!* This certainly does not imply the illegitimacy of the right to property, but demands a conception of it and its consequent regulation which will safeguard and further its intrinsic "social function" (cf. *Mater et Magistra*, n. 111; *Populorum progressio*, n. 23).

Every person, every people, has the right to live off the fruits of the earth. At the beginning of the new millennium, it is an intolerable scandal that so many people are still reduced to hunger and live in conditions unworthy of man. *We can no longer limit ourselves to academic reflections:* we must rid humanity of this disgrace through appropriate political and economic decisions with a global scope. As I wrote in my Message to the Director-General of the FAO on the occasion of World Food Day, it is necessary "to uproot the causes of hunger and malnutrition" (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 1 November 2000, p. 3). As is widely known, this situation has a variety of causes. Among the most absurd are the frequent conflicts within States, which are often true wars of the poor. And there remains the burdensome legacy of

an often unjust distribution of wealth in individual nations and at the world level.

6. This is an aspect which the celebration of the Jubilee brings precisely to our special attention. For the original institution of the Jubilee, as it is formulated in the Bible, was aimed at *re-establishing equality among the children of Israel* also by restoring property, so that the poorest people could pick themselves up again and everyone could experience, including at the level of a dignified life, the joy of belonging to the one people of God.

Our Jubilee, 2,000 years after Christ's birth, must also bear this sign of universal brotherhood. It represents a message that is addressed not only to believers, but *to all people of good will*, so that they will be resolved, in their economic decisions, to abandon the logic of sheer advantage and combine legitimate "profit" with the value and practice of solidarity. As I have said on other occasions, we need a *globalization of solidarity*, which in turn presupposes a "culture of solidarity" that must flourish in every heart.

7. Thus, while we never cease to urge the public authorities, the great economic powers and the most influential institutions to move in this direction, we must be convinced that there is a "conversion" that involves us all personally. We must start with ourselves. For this reason, in the Encyclical *Centesimus annus*, along with the discussions of the ecological question, I pointed to *the urgent need for a "human ecology"*. This concept is meant to recall that "not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed" (*Centesimus annus*, n. 38). If man loses his sense of life and the security of moral standards, wandering aimlessly in the fog of indifferentism, no policy will be effective for safeguarding both the concerns of nature and those of society. Indeed, it is man who can build or destroy, respect or despise, share or reject. The great problems posed by the agricultural sector, in which you are directly involved, should be faced not only as "technical" or "political" problems, but at their root as "moral problems".

8. It is therefore the inescapable responsibility of those who work with the name of Christians to give a credible witness in this area. Unfortunately, in the countries of the so-called "developed" world *an irrational consumerism* is spreading, a sort of "culture of waste", which is becoming a widespread lifestyle. This tendency must be opposed. To teach a use of goods which never forgets either the limits of available resources or the poverty of so many human beings, and which consequently *tempers one's lifestyle with the duty of fraternal sharing*, is a true pedagogical challenge and a very far-sighted decision. In this task, the world of those who work the land with its tradition of moderation and heritage of wisdom accumulated amid much suffering, can make an incomparable contribution.

9. I am therefore very grateful for this "Jubilee" witness, which holds up the great values of the agricultural world to the attention of the whole Christian community and all society. Follow in the footsteps of your best tradition, opening yourselves to all *the developments of the technological era*, but jealously safeguarding *the perennial values* that characterize you. This is also the way to give a hope-filled future to the world of agriculture. A hope that is based on God's work, of which the Psalmist sings: "You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it (*Ps 65: 10*).

As I implore this visit from God, source of prosperity and peace for the countless families who work in the rural world, I would like to impart an Apostolic Blessing to everyone at the end of this meeting.

Before leaving the Pope said to those present:

I would like to thank you for this lovely evening, for the invitation and for the beautiful link between the rural, agricultural world and modern music. Thanks to everyone for the participation of representatives from all the countries; this is the way that the whole universal Church lives and celebrates the Jubilee.

I wish you a good rest. Tomorrow another great celebration awaits you. Let us hope for good weather.

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